The Florida Legislature

The Florida Legislature is a bicameral body comprised of two chambers, the 120-member Florida House of Representatives, and the 40-member Florida Senate. Members of the House are elected to serve two-year terms, whereas members of the Senate are elected to serve four-year terms. No member of either chamber can run for re-election if they have served eight consecutive years in that office.

Voters elect legislators to represent their district, the geographic boundaries of which are drawn every ten years based on population through a reapportionment process outlined in Florida's Constitution.

Florida's legislature convenes once a year for a constitutionally mandated 60-day legislative session and during several committee weeks in the months leading up to it. According to Florida's Constitution, the Legislature is only required to do one thing: pass a balanced budget each year. However, legislators serve citizens in a number of other ways.

What Legislators Do

Legislation—Legislators create and revise Florida statutes to best serve the citizens they represent as well as the needs of the state as a whole.

Resolutions—Resolutions are used for a variety of purposes, such as recognizing the achievement of a person or placing an amendment to Florida’s constitution on the ballot.

Memorials—State legislators use memorials to voice the concerns of citizens on important policy issues and subjects outside of their jurisdiction, such as federal policy.

State Agency Supervision—In order to ensure policies and programs are being properly managed, the Legislature frequently reviews agency programs and spending.
Community Outreach—For most of the year, Florida legislators are in their district offices meeting with community leaders and citizens to assess the needs of their area.

Constituent Services—Legislators act as a liaison to other governmental agencies and private organizations to resolve issues that affect their constituents.

Key Players

Presiding Officers
Each chamber has a presiding officer who typically serves a two-year term and who is elected by the members of their respective chamber. The presiding officer of the Senate is the President; the presiding officer in the House is the Speaker. The presiding officer typically presides over the daily sessions of the chamber and preserves order; appoints committee members and chairs, refers bills to committees; and acts as the official spokesperson for the chamber.

Pro Tems
Each presiding officer appoints a Pro Tem to act in their absence. Although largely an honorary position, the primary roles of the President Pro Tem and Speaker Pro Tem are to preside over the chamber in the absence of the presiding officer; and to exercise the powers and duties of the presiding officer in their absence.

Majority and Minority Leaders
Each party has leaders who serve as the lead speaker for their parties during floor debates, and assist in the development of policy and calendars.

Caucus Chairs
Caucuses representing specific interests (e.g., Hispanic Legislative Caucus, Black Legislative Caucus, etc.) are formed to advocate for issues that are important to their members. Each caucus elects a Chair who is responsible for developing the caucus agenda with the principal leaders; presiding over caucus meetings; and developing policy.

Whips
Each party appoints one or more whips, whose responsibilities include assisting their party’s floor leader; ensuring member attendance and counting votes; and communicating the party position.

ABOUT THE TAXWATCH CENTER FOR FLORIDA CITIZENSHIP

The TaxWatch Center for Florida Citizenship works to educate citizens on the policies and operations of their state and local governments, in order to encourage an informed electorate capable of effectively holding those elected to positions of power accountable. The Center also operates the Florida Citizenship Institute, an applied learning program that prepares participants to understand how government action impacts their business.

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Roles and Responsibilities of Selected Leadership Positions, National Conference of State Legislatures, October 20, 2013.